DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 400 840 IR 056 155

AUTHOR Hancock, Susan
TITLE Condensed and Enriched: Images of the Miniature and of the World of Children's Literature.
PUB DATE 96
NOTE 5p.; In: Sustaining the Vision. Selected Papers from the Annual Conference of the International Association of School Librarianship (24th, Worcester, England, July 17-21, 1995); see IR 056 149.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Attitudes; Authors; Books; Characterization; *Childrens Literature; Enrichment; *Fiction; Foreign Countries; Futures (of Society); *Imagery; *Literary Devices; Literary Genres; Metaphors; Nonprint Media; Printed Materials; Reader Text Relationship; Values
IDENTIFIERS *Adult Child Relationship; Barrie (J M); Kipling (Rudyard)

ABSTRACT

Research into the portrayal of miniature human-like characters in the fictional narratives of art and literature suggests that profound values abound in the miniature. The paper discusses two examples of fairy miniatures, Rudyard Kipling's "Puck" and J. M. Barrie's "Tinker Bell." Little characters, whatever their provenance, can be dressed up in any disguise for those other little people--children--to digest. Many of the characters in children's narratives, like miniature characters, have metaphorical dimensions. Animals, toys, and all manner of creatures are used to create condensed and enriched images of society and the adults as well as the children who inhabit it. Children's literature encompasses all the genres of adult fiction, from fantasy to realism, from epic to fairy tale; writers of different sexes, races, and religions; and includes poetry and prose fictional narratives produced in varying media, from film, video, and cartoon, to stage, CD-ROM, and printed page. Far from being reductive, the world of children's literature is a condensation and enrichment of possible subject matter. Children's literature is important; it can shed light on the past, illuminate the future, and lay open visions of the future for discussion and debate. (Contains 21 references.) (Author/SWC)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 400 840

Condensed and Enriched: Images of the Miniature and of the World of Children's Literature.

by
Susan Hancock
Roehampton Institute
London

Once, when I was very small, I was given a tiny cardboard Christmas castle, which functioned as an advent calendar; each minute doorway and shuttered turret window concealing an even smaller gift or message. I do not remember what it contained, only that sense of delight as I imagined the castle to be peopled by tiny beings, each door and window capable of open-ing the way into my own miniature world. In Mistress Masham's Repose, T. H. White captures something of the complexity of such feelings as he presents his child character Maria struggling with the moral dilemmas which arise as a result of her discovery of Lilliputians on an island on her family's estate. Should those who are small and not empowered in their own world seek to impose their rule on other miniature worlds; recreating the conditions of their own vulnerability to the detriment of other helpless beings? Another of White's characters, the Professor, advises Maria:

> ... people must not tyrannize, nor try to be great because they are little.... you do not need to lord it over others, in order to prove your greatness.... They [the Lilliputians] would come to depend on you; you would come to boss it over them. They would get servile, and you would get lordly. Do you think that this would be good for either of you? I think that it would only make them feeble, and make you a bully. (White, 1947, pp.28-29)

Clearly the argument which is being put forward in White's book has philosophical implications which are far wider than advice to someone on dealing with *Lilliputians* (or any other miniature characters one might find at the bottom of the garden). Indeed it can be understood as a lesson in power relationships--a characteristic of narratives of the miniature.

As White's book shows, the significance of the miniature can bear an inverse relation to its size. Gaston Bachelard, writing on The *Poetics of Space* claims that:

> The cleverer I am at miniaturizing the world, the better I possess it. But in doing this, it must be understood that values become condensed and enriched in miniature ....miniature literature--that is to say, the aggregate of literary images that are commentaries on inversions in the perspective of size stimulates profound values. (Bachelard, tr. Jolas: 1964, p.150)

Susan Stewart, also supports the idea, stating that the "reduction of physical dimensions results in a multiplication of ideological properties" (Stewart, 1989, pp.47-48). My own research into the portrayal of miniature hominiform characters in the fictional narratives of art and literature has led me to believe that Bachelard and Stewart are right to suggest that profound values abound in the miniature.

There will not be time in this short paper to look at all the occurrences of miniature characters that I would wish to cite in support of this argument. Such characters are many and varied, ranging from the fairies and goblins of fantasy and romance and the picaresque *Tom Thumb*, to the *Borrowers* who, as miniatures with a "down-to-earth" hominiform appearance and no magical powers, exist at the very nexus of fantasy and realism. Instead I have selected two examples from the world of fairy miniatures, beginning with the Kipling's *Puck* and moving on to Barrie's *Tinker Bell*.

In Kipling's books *Puck of Pook's Hill* and *Rewards and Fairies*, Puck is presented as a:

> ... small, brown, broad-shouldered, pointy-eared person with a snub nose, slanting blue eyes, and a grin that ran right across his freckled face....[wearing a] dark blue cap, like a big columbine flower,.... (Kipling, 1906, pp.6-7)

IR056155

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Ken Haycock
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

But Kipling's portrayal is not the only version of this character. Images of male fairy characters abound, and can range from a chubby, benign Lucie Attwell version to manifestations such as Richard Dadd's painting of Puck, in which the character, shining pale naked, directs a malevolent yet voyeuristic gaze on a troop of nude adult male and female figures as they cavort in sensual dance around and about his toadstool. Kipling's *Puck* is clearly a different character from either of these, despite sharing common roots. You may question the validity of making such comparisons. Yet Kipling explicitly draws his readers' attention to just such preexisting references, or "antirefernces," linking his character to the Puck of *Midsummer Night's Dream* and to folk belief in *the People of the Hills*. Part of any analysis of Kipling's Puck must include mention of what he is not; the ways in which he is drawn differently from other portrayals of male fairy characters.

A character, designated as a human being, enters a "classic realist"[1] text as an attempted simulacrum of a possible person. As readers we arrive at the sense of a living person by putting together the physical and mental attributes supplied in the text, (both described and deduced from the reported thoughts and actions of the character[2]). These portrayals are synecdochal in nature. Not only are they constructed from textual fragments--an eye, a cheek, a whisper are described and a whole body is recreated--they are also stand in place of other living beings. The essence of an individual, within a social formation, is created, as we as readers search for a possible being among the textual clues. A character such as *Puck* is substantially different; he is not human, and cannot therefore function as a synecdochal representation of human beings, but neither does he stand as a synecdochal representation of other Pucks. Rather his presence functions in a metaphorical sphere; free to represent something other than the form in which he is cast, yet constrained, by the name of *Puck*, to the inevitability of comparison with other Pucks that are familiar to those who read about him.

Contrasting Puck's bodily size and the depth and resonance of his voice--perhaps symbolizing the relative position of ordinary English men and women, apparently lowly in the scheme of things, but with a resonance that echoes down the centuries, Kipling builds up an image of Puck that may be seen as a kind of condensed essence of all that Kipling regards as the best of those ordinary men and women, working in an unbroken succession at their own crafts and trades, while ephemeral rulers come and go. Because of the ambivalent "baggage" pre-associated with his character, Kipling attempts to create a condensed image which can, at the same time, draw on board the essence of Englishness evoked by mention of Shakespeare, the suggestion of timelessness associated with traditional folk forms, yet remain distanced from the more unsavory fairy attributes. For example, Puck's blue cap contrasts with traditional red capped sprites--Duffy suggests that red capped male fairies represent the blood topped phallus/rape; whether or not this is true, they were traditionally regarded as malevolent entities[3]]. Similarly, in place of the amoral and immoral romps of earlier Pucks, Kipling highlights episodes which assert the true spirited moral and ethical base of his character, as when Puck breathes on the neck of a farmer who callously abandons a baby on the cold church steps, making him perpetually cold. Inside the text Kipling shows Puck convincing the child characters, Dan and Una, that he is to be liked and trusted; no doubt Kipling hoped that readers too would be persuaded to banish unfavorable preconceptions, yet make imagina-tive use of this same extratextual "baggage" to respond fully to such a condensed and enriched presence as *Puck of Pook's Hill*.

Like *Puck*, J.M. Barrie's *Tinker Bell* is not a synecdochal "standin" for other fairies, created to help us understand Fairy nature. She, too, has been given a metaphorical dimension, drawing upon other preexistent fairy portrayals to create her full significance. There are plenty of "amiable" and "pretty-pretty" fairies in stories for children, Barrie does not associate Tinker Bell with such benign versions, constructing her image in a much closer relationship with the malicious and sexual creatures portrayed in paintings of fairy orgies![4] A full-size, nonmaternal, sexually aware female, in a text considered suitable (though probably not for) children, even if allowed to exist, would not carry the fully enriched significance that can be encompassed by a condensed metaphorical representation such as *Tinker Bell*.

When one considers the 'new women' of the late Victorian and Edwardian eras, one may wonder whether Tinker Bell exists, in some measure, as Barrie's metaphor for these; condensed in order to disempower her otherwise threatening sexuality and rebellious nature, as well as for the practical presentation reasons suggested above. You may disagree, but then, part of her significance exists in our freedom to make imaginative searches for a likely extra-textual tenor to her

metaphorical vehicle. Portrayed as one of the those "strange" creatures that "Peter, who knew them best, often cuffed" (p.96) Tinker Bell fades in Barrie's 1911 version of Peter and Wendy to the final oblivion of a woman whose prime purpose was NOT to be a mother figure. Even Wendy is shocked as Peter later wonders, "Who is Tinker Bell?" (p.218). Yet her character does not fade, the miniature fairy has merely added Barrie's "baggage" to that which she carried before, and is off again, ready to be transformed for other audiences, as a myriad of other incarnations await.

Kipling explicitly states that the tales in Rewards and Fairies: "were meant for grown-ups"[5], yet the book is usually still classified as a children's classic. Barrie's fairies (excluding *Tinker Bell*) first appeared within a narrative for adults: *The Little White Bird* (1902). Other miniatures, from *Tom Thumb* to Swift's *Lilliputians*, have moved inexorably from the domain of narratives for adults to the domain of narratives for children. It seems that little characters, whatever their provenance, can be dressed up in any disguise for those other little people--children--to digest. Perhaps many adults, who do not understand that miniature productions can contain so much that might be regarded as adult in meaning, have made a connection with children's fiction, simply because they regard that too as a smaller place, a one stop location for anything regarded as child-sized. But, like the miniature characters that so often inhabit it, children's literature is not one small, single genre in the wider adult library. It is another world, encompassing all the genres of adult fiction from fantasy to realism, from epic to fairy tale. It is a body of work which encompasses writers of different sexes, races and religions, and includes poetry and prose fictional narratives produced in varying media--from film, video and cartoon to stage, CD Rom and printed page. Richer than adult literature in picture books, in illustrated books, and in narratives in cartoon and computerized formats, children's literature also encourages the free use of named characters in regular new and often enriching incarnations, quite unconcerned with the pejorative undertones which deter writers for adults from such extensive character transfer. Many of the characters in narratives for children, like miniature characters, have metaphorical dimensions; animals, toys, all manner of creatures are used to create condensed and enriched images of society and the adults as well as the children who inhabit it. The world of children's literature is a world that concentrates on compact visual and verbal images, including the condensation of dream images, from the *Wild Things* of Maurice Sendak, to the metaphorical images of psychological states encountered in adolescent novels such as *Dangerous Spaces* (Mahy) and *Marianne Dreams* (Storr).

Far from being reductive, the world of children's literature is a condensation and enrichment of possible subject matter. Indeed if, as has been suggested, we make sense of the world in narrative and the philosophy of the world is predominantly expressed in the world's literature[6], the narratives placed at the disposal of children must have the potential to be the most important narratives of all. We may never fully understand what individual children, in interacting with fictional narratives, learn of society's ethical values--or lack of ethical values; however, many of the adults who have written for children, over the last two centuries, have encoded in their work the roles they have seen as open, or closed, to particular groups of children, and the futures they have desired, or feared, for them. Whether real "flesh-and-blood" children have accepted or rebelled against these models, some fragments must inevitably be carried into the future, as building blocks, or faultlines, of the world of tomorrow. Even when vested interests--from religious groups to publishers concerned with making a profit--dictate which stories reach the market place the stories themselves are still an illuminative microcosm magnifying the mores of the macrocosm--the society of their production--whether consciously or unconsciously, in a particularly acute manner. Narratives composed for children or read by children can be seen as the space where adult and child meet, where hopes and fears for the future are located, where adult-created images of childhood, that condensed and enriched space, can be exposed.

If children's literature, far from being a small and relatively unimportant genre, is recognized as a condensed and enriched miniature world of great significance, then perhaps there is scope for regarding the adults who are involved in the field as members of an equally condensed and enriched subject world, fully capable of supporting the most diverse of approaches. The delegates attending conferences relating to children's literature offer evidence of the variety of perspectives from which the subject is approached. Similarly the research database at the Children's Literature Research Center at the Roehampton Institute is peopled with studies by researchers with many varied interests: bibliographers, biographers, educationists, historians, librarians, literary critics and psychologists. **ALL** these areas are important and it is important too that we value the work of

those whose areas of interest differ from our own. At the end of the day we **ALL** agree that children's literature is important. It can shed light on the past, illuminate the future, and lay open our visions of the future for discussion and debate. The best texts (whatever our individual views on which these may be) can and should be a rich source of joy and delight to adults and children everywhere.

Notes

1. As defined by Belsey in Critical Practice.
2. See Rimmon-Kenan (1983) and Chatman (1978) for a fuller discussion of this process.
3. Briggs gives a most useful analysis of fairy "types," and their attributes, in *The Personnel of Fairyland*.
4. By artists such as John Anster Fitzgerald (1819-1906), Henry Fuseli (1721-1825), Sir Joseph Noel Paton (1821-1901) and others.
5. Kipling, Rudyard, from *Something of Myself* (Macmillan, 1964 pp.190-1) as quoted by Stephen Prickett.
6. See Chambers, Fullbrook, Grant, Hardy, to name but a few.

Bibliography

Primary sources

Atwell, Lucie. *Lucie Atwell's Annual*. London: Dean & Son Ltd., 1960.

Barrie, J. M. *Peter Pan: The Complete Book*. Montreal: Tundra Books, 1988. First published under the title *Peter and Wendy* in 1911.

Barrie, J. M. *The Little White Bird*. London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1902.

Kipling, Rudyard. *Puck of Pook's Hill*. London: Macmillan & Co., Ltd, 1951. First pub-lished 1906.

Kipling, Rudyard. *Rewards and Fairies*. London: Macmillan & Co. Ltd., 1937. First published 1910.

Mahy, Margaret. *Dangerous Spaces*. Harmondswarth: Penguin Books Ltd. (Puffin), 1992. First published in 1991.

Storr, Catherine Marianne *Dreams*. Harmondswarth: Penguin Books Ltd. (Puffin), 1964. First published in 1958.

White, T. H. *Mistress Masham's Repose*. Harmondswarth: Penguin Books Ltd. (Puffin), 1972. First published in 1947.

Secondary sources

Bachelard, Gaston. *The Poetics of Space*. Tr. from the French by Maria Jolas. New York: The Orion Press, 1964.

Belsey, Catherine. *Critical Practice*. London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1980.

Briggs, K. M. *The Personnel of Fairyland*. Oxford: Alden Press, 1953.

Chambers, Aidan. *Booktalk: Occasional Writing on Literature and Children*. London: The Bodley Head Ltd., 1985.

Chatman, Seymour. *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film*. New York: Cornell University Press, 1978.

Duffy, Maureen. *The Erotic World of Faery*. London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1972.

Fullbrook, Kate. *Free Women: Ethics and Aesthetics in Twentieth-Century Women's Fic-tion*. London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990.

Grant, Damien *Realism*. London: Methuen & Co Ltd., 1970.

Hardy, Barbara. "Towards a Poetics of Fction: An Approach Through Narrative" in Meek, Margaret, Warlow, Aidan, and Barton, Griselda. *The Cool Web: The Pattern of Children's Reading*. London: The Bodley Head Ltd., 1977.

Phillpotts, Beatrice. Fairy *Paintings*. London: Ash & Grant Ltd., 1978.

Prickett, Stephen. *Victorian Fantasy*. Sussex. The Harvester Press Ltd., 1979.

Rimmon-Kenan, Shlomith. *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics*. London: Methuen & Co. Ltd, 1983. Stewart, Susan. On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection. Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1984.

Stewart. Susan. *On Longing : Naritives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir Col-lection*. Baltimore: The John Hopkins Uni-versty Press, 1984.